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The Story of a Swedish Hussar and his *Torp*

(The article on *Torp and Torpare* in the September issue of *SAG* elicited many favorable comments from our readers. One of them, Frederic E. Pamp of Santa Ynez, CA., himself a descendant of a Swedish hussar, translated the following account of the life of a hussar and his hussar's *torp*, or croft in Småland in the 19th century. The original account appeared in *Smålandsryttaren*, a journal published by the Smålands Husarers Förening, consisting of those who are interested in the history of the *Kungliga Smålands Husarregemente*, and written by Birger Linde, who recalls his mother's reminiscences from those early days.)

On the ice of Lake Hjorten in Virserum Parish in Småland King Gustav Vasa once fought a decisive battle in the month of March 1543 against the troops of Nils Dacke, the revolutionary *smålander*. After this battle, the king wrote to the governor of Kalmar county and to the commander of Kronoberg castle near Växjö, ordering the deployment of Swedish troops to the villages of Småland. That order may with reason be seen as the founding document of the Småland Cavalry Regiment, known as the Hussars.

The groundwork of the organization of the Swedish military was to be laid later in the 1680s and 1690s, and this was to remain in force until 1901, when it was replaced by universal military service. The form of the organization was grounded in the old agricultural society. Officers and men lived on the land, officers in their residences, the hussars on their respective *torp*. Each larger farm formed or contributed to a squad or headquarters known as *rusthåll*. If the farms were small, they also shared in the defense responsibility. Each squad was responsible for setting aside a plot of land large enough to feed a cow and several sheep for each hussar. Farmers participating in setting up the detachment were also to build a dwelling 12 alnar (ells) long and seven to eight alnar wide (one aln = 60 centimeters) or the equivalent of approximately 24 feet long, together with a cowshed and necessary outhouses. When the hussar was away on maneuvers, the farm laborers would do the necessary work on the *torp*, while at the same time maintaining it, for the buildings had to be kept up in good condition. Building and maintenance were closely associated. The regiment itself bore the name of the province, in this case Småland, the companies or squadrons carried the name of the parish where they were located and the soldier or hussar was numbered by the squad or *rusthåll* in which he served, as for example No. 92 Björkmossa of the Staby Squadron.

For many years the Staby Squadron assembled and was dismissed at the Björkmossa Inn, owned and operated by my mother's, Signe Linde's parents, the Danielssons. The Staby Squadron consisted of 100 enlisted hussars, who all resided in their *husartorp*. There were also a few hussars who worked for wages. The Staby Squadron drew its manpower from the hundreds of Aspeland, Handbörd and Stranda and if memory serves me right, also a number of hussars from Kristdala and Misterhult parishes in the hundred of Tunalän.

In 1957 my mother, Signe Linde, wrote down her reminiscences from Björkmossa Inn in the 1890s.

"Within Virserum Parish there were five headquarters or *rusthåll*, No. 91 Ekeflod; No. 92 Björkmossa, No. 93 Hässlid, No. 94 Aggstorp and No. 95 Misterhult. It was a beautiful sight to see when these five hussar squads participated together with the soldiers of the *Kungliga Kalmar Regemente* in church parades and on other ceremonial occasions.

Then one day the hussars and the entire squadron were mustered for the regular regimental maneuvers, usually at the end of August or the beginning of September. There was life and movement when the hussars assembled at Björkmossa. The day before the muster, the squadron commander arrived, usually a captain or lieutenant of cavalry, to get ready to receive his squadron. On the day before, the hussars at Björkmossa drew their rations for two days. The ration consisted of a loaf of bread each, two or three scoops of butter, a piece of salt pork and perhaps a piece of cheese. Besides these rations there were also several pecks of oats for the horses.

Then came the day of the muster and the hussars began arriving, by ones, twos and even up to seven and eight in company. The horses were tied to the inn fence on the harvested field, or perhaps to a tree. After the hussars had looked after and tended to their horses, word was passed to the captain. I remember to this day and can still hear how it sounded: "Captain, hussar No.92 Asp for Björkmossa reporting." And the captain, in this case von Malmberg, replied: "Good! Next!"

When the entire squadron had assembled the inspection took place - of horses, equipment, personal appearance, etc. A hussar from Mörlunda had allowed his sideburns to grow so that they hung down on his shoulders, the longest sideburns I had ever seen. Lieutenant Carleson, who conducted the inspection, said: "In this army three kinds of beards are allowed: mustaches, like mine, imperials, i.e. narrow beards, like Sergeant Björkegren's and full beards like those of our regimental commander, Bråkenhielm. All other types of beards are forbidden. By the time evening prayers are said, Krig will be properly clipped and tidied up!" Krig hastened down to the carpenters in the barn, who also tended to haircutting and the sharpening of razors.

We at the inn had a lot of work to do serving coffee to the hussars, who needed something to drink with their sandwiches. Some of them bought a bottle of beer. The atmosphere was joyous and a few of the men were good singers and sang various songs. Many of the people from the surrounding farms gathered around for it was interesting to chat with hussars, for they brought with them new impressions and ideas from their home areas.

Then came the time for formation. The captain at that time gave orders that the following day's march was to go to Eksjö and Ränneslätt, which was the headquarters of the regiment as well as the maneuver area for the entire regiment. He also announced the billeting, who was to sleep in the hay loft of the headquarters or in lodgings and who was to watch the horses. Then followed evening prayers and a psalm was sung; "Thus passeth a day from our time on earth". The captain read the Lord's Prayer and a blessing and finally the soldiers gave the old soldier's prayer: "God bless the King and our Fatherland."

At four-thirty in the morning the bugler sounded reveille and the hussars rose and hastened to harness and feed the horses. Then they went for coffee in their mugs, serving themselves. The officers had their own breakfast on the second floor of the inn, the sergeants on the first floor.

At a quarter to seven the bugle sounded again, this time for mounting up. The squadron was ready for the march. Report to the squadron commander, then the morning prayers, the singing of a psalm, "The gleaming sun once more arises"; the saying of the Lord's Prayer, the blessing and the final "God save the King and our Fatherland". After a moment of silence Captain von Malmborg gave the command: "Staby Squadron, double file, forward march".

Slowly the squadron set itself in motion in order to ride to Upplanda, where it rested before continuing on to Eksjö.

Thus the regimental muster took place and when it was over the squadron returned to Björkmossa. The captain held a critique of the performance during the muster and maneuver. He then ordered that after the horses had rested three hours, the hussars were to return to their *rusthåll*.

Many people had assembled at Björkmossa to greet the returning hussars. It was amusing to hear the hussars tell about the muster and other maneuvers. When they described what great fields of grain they had seen during the maneuvers at the beginning of the 1890s, many people thought the hussars were lying.

Right up to the 1950s the hussar veterans came to Björkmossa to talk about the old times, which had been to them a wondrous holiday".